DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 246 098 TM 840 371

AUTHOR Cuthbert, Marlene
TITLE Evaluation Problems in Third World Settings.
PUB DATE Apr 84
NOTE 16p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (68th, New Orleans, LA, April 23-27, 1984).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Viewpoints (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS *Developing Nations; *Evaluation Methods; Evaluators; Foreign Countries; Research Problems
IDENTIFIERS *Evaluation Problems

ABSTRACT

Because human beings are different and are necessarily subjective, and because evaluation always involves the human factor, many problems arise. The problems may be compounded in third world settings because they have been studied less, and are less understood, and because evaluators are often from outside the setting and therefore bring unquestioned assumptions and values which limit their perceptions. Several problems may arise that can paralyze the best evaluation design of the unwary researcher. These problems include methodological issues; lack of understanding of the purpose and importance of evaluation; lack of supporting infrastructure; lack of written response; lack of awareness of research methodology; public holidays; crises; suspicion of and respect for outsiders; language; and culture, class, ideology, and differing agendas. Being aware of and struggling with these problems should help to bring the evaluator nearer to achieving the understanding essential for a productive evaluation. (BW)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED246098

EVALUATION PROBLEMS IN THIRD WORLD SETTINGS

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

Marlene Cuthbert
University of the West Indies
Kingston 7, Jamaica

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL IN MICROFICHE ONLY HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

M. Cuthbert

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

TM 840 371

Paper presented to
Symposium on Responsive Evaluation of International Development Programs
Sponsored by American Educational Research Association
New Orleans, Louisiana, April 23-27, 1984

EVALUATION PROBLEMS IN THIRD WORLD SETTINGS

Marlene Cuthbert

Evaluators are increasingly understanding the implications of the fact that evaluation is a 'social' rather than a 'hard' science and, as such, must use different methods from those used in the natural sciences since human beings are different from other objects of nature. Because human beings are different and are necessarily subjective, and because evaluation always involves the human factor, many problems arise.

The problems may be compounded in third world settings because they have been studied less, and are less understood, and because evaluators are often from outside the setting and therefore bring unquestioned assumptions and values which limit their perceptions.

Evaluation is normally conducted to provide information for policy makers and planners so as to reduce their uncertainty and help them make sound judgments. The basic problem for any evaluator is selecting the methodology most appropriate to a particular situation, and this is made more difficult by an unfamiliar third world situation. Having overcome that hurdle, the contribution of the evaluator can be greatly limited by other problems, some of which are easy to overcome and some of which can never be overcome but can, at least, be modified -- if the evaluator is aware of the problems.

Using as major primary sources the author's evaluation experience in more than a dozen third world countries in the Caribbean, as well as feedback from European and North American researchers in the region, this paper analyzes problems that may arise and may paralyze the best evaluation design of the unwary researcher.

1) Methodological Issues

> Research is always and by logical necessity based upon moral and political valuations, and the researcher should be obliged to account for this explicitly.[1]

This statement by G. Myrdal of Sweden is as true of evaluation in particular as it is of research in general and goes to the heart of the problem faced by evaluators. It is the inescapability of 'moral and political valuations' that makes evaluation so much more difficult for the outsider in third world settings.

Accounting explicitly for such issues means that the evaluator has to come to terms with his/her own basic assumptions and values and this is difficult to do, especially for people from large developed societies where they rarely have to come to terms with third world perspectives.

Implicit here of course is the acceptance of the importance of qualitative evaluation data. Much has already been written about the dangers of trying to apply in third world countries the methodologies, models and categories devised in and for the developed world. Evaluators who focus on quantitative methods and results, and narrowly conceive of evaluation as a problem of technical rationality,[2] are in particular danger of being culturally insensitive and reaching faulty conclusions.

In contrast to the quantitative approach which is aimed at prediction of phenomena, qualitative methods are aimed at understanding--Verstehen--and are more attuned to contextual issues.

The two approaches are often assumed to be mutually exclusive. This assumption is made in part because some researchers assume that research

based on the quantitative paradigm can use 'objective' methods while research based on the qualitative paradigm cannot do so. Such an assumption forgets that all social theory starts with normative notions about the nature of individuals, society and the relationship between them. Different views of reality and the nature of change lead to different assumptions about appropriate goals, treatment and evaluation models. No evaluation approach is free of bias, including the approach that masks bias with scientific jargon which often hides value judgments.[3] As experienced evaluator, Michael Patton, observes, the fundamental question is whose values will bias the question, not whether or not questions will be biased. The issue is not one of avoiding bias but rather one of making biases explicit.[4]

Evaluators, then, should be aware of the range of ideological and methodological perspectives and approaches, and of the biases in each. A combination of approaches may often be best suited to particular needs.

The major lesson here for evaluators is that there are different ways of looking at the same phenomenon and that each way is filtered through an observer; hence, as Patton states, we are always dealing with perceptions, not 'facts' in some absolute sense.[5] In the third world, unfamiliarity with the context makes it much more difficult for the perceptions of outside evaluators to approach a truthful reflection of reality.[6]

2) Lack of Understanding of the Purpose and Importance of Evaluation

Evaluation is new to most third world people, just as it is to many in the United States. The evaluator and the evaluation process will be treated with some suspicion until trust and understanding are established. The first task for the evaluator, then, is education. This begins from the moment the word evaluation is raised, hopefully in the planning stages of the project. All stakeholders in the project need to understand evaluation as an aid and not a threat.

Because of the lack of understanding of the importance of evaluation, project or program funding is rarely allocated for evaluation. Requests for evaluation in the Caribbean region usually come from outside funding agencies such as U.S.-AID, the World Bank, or British and German agencies. If an evaluation is requested from a Caribbean agency, the budget is usually so limited as to make an adequate evaluation design impossible. Thus part of the evaluator's educational role should be to encourage project and program planners to budget for an adequate evaluation.

3) Lack of Supporting Infrastructure

Most third world evaluation contacts begin by mail or telephone. The speed of mail delivery varies -- mail may reach Barbados and Jamaica in as little as five or six days but at other times may take up to two weeks. In the LDC's (Less Developed Countries) of the Caribbean, especially Belize, mail almost always takes two weeks and sometimes nearly a month. If time is short, you are well advised to use telephone, telex or cable. Many Caribbean

countries have better external than internal telephone services. However, since strikes in public utilities are fairly common, it is wise to cover yourself by sending important information by more than one means of communication.

Be prepared for the fact that, with the increasing scarcity of foreign exchange, cars are becoming more of a luxury in third world countries and the expense of taxis and rented cars is therefore high. Roads are often bad and it is important to allow enough time for travel if you have to leave the capital. A sixty mile trip may take three hours and not one as in the U.S.

The evaluator needs to be aware of several factors in relation to air transport. Caribbean countries usually have better air links with the outside world than with each other. For example, to travel between Jamaica and the eastern Caribbean on certain days, it is necessary to go to Miami and then back down to the Caribbean. Planes are often overbooked and you will be 'bounced' unceremoniously so reconfirm your flight and be at the airport at the time specified. And do not allow yourself to be pushed to the back of a disorderly queue and thereby fail to obtain a seat as has happened to this evaluator!

Travel as lightly as you can since luggage is weighed and overweight is charged when luggage exceeds 44 pounds. This is hard on the evaluator who must often collect a lot of heavy paper. Try to carry all important materials in your hand luggage because checked luggage may be left behind -- though rarely lost -- when planes are overloaded. The luggage usually arrives in a day or two but by that time you may be on your way to the next island. Flights are often delayed and sometimes cancelled so try to call the airport in advance to check on the flight. Finally, leave a couple of days free in your itinerary to accommodate the unexpected need for re-scheduling.

When questioned about infrastructural problems, one European researcher said he experienced a "lack of everything." He pointed, inter alia, to the difficulty of getting access to a typewriter or photocopying facilities, and to the serious lack of reference books, journals and library resources in general. He added that, in a region with countries having various combinations of 220/110 voltage and 50/60 cycles, hotels should keep converters!

4) Lack of Written Response

Some people in the Caribbean do not make it a habit to reply to mail promptly or at all. There may be several reasons for this: they often do not type or have secretaries, so a reply takes more effort; they may be swamped with requests from outside asking for information and may know from experience that most of these requests will result in little benefit to their country; and in some countries where the oral tradition is strong, written responses may be less common.

My files contain dozens of unanswered letters to Caribbean government and media personnel. Hence it is usually best to rely on telephone communication. In cases where written commitment is necessary, you may need to initiate this by means of a telephone conversation with the right person. And do try to get the commitment of a decision-maker at the top. Be prepared, however, for the fact that there is often considerable turnover in decision-makers. Many are replaced after elections, there are internal reshuffles, they go on 'long leave', study leave and training courses -- and the evaluator may not be informed.

5) Lack of Awareness of Research Methodology

The ramifications of this problem are immense and anyone who is inclined to ulcers or 'pressure' should not do research in the third world. People in most Caribbean countries are unfamiliar with social science research methods, particularly the specifities of sampling. Some personal anecdotes will illustrate the problem.

In carrying out an evaluation of the Caribbean News Agency (CANA) for the Caribbean Community (CAPICOM), I needed a two week continuous sample of the CANA news file for content analysis purposes. The sample was to be the basis for comparison with two week samples frm the media to determine how much of the CANA file the media used. During a prior trip through Barbados I went to CANA and asked the general manager and editor to provide an extra copy of the news file for me and they promised to do so. When I reached Jamaica I wrote to remind them of the commitment and the dates. On the day that they were to begin collecting the sample, I phoned the editor and was assured that they had begun.

On arrival in Barbados three weeks later, I was given a two week sample of the news file but the sample period began and ended two days later than specified. The editor explained that the first two days of the sample had disappeared because the radio station telex machine had stopped working and the radio news editor came to the CANA office on those days and asked for a copy of the news file. A CANA reporter saw my extra copy and gave it to the radio station. It was used by radio and destroyed before the editor knew what had happened! The editor assumed that adding on two days beyond the sample period would solve the problem..... I was welcome to use the original CANA copy but it was already cut up and filed under various headings and, at

any rate, I did not have an extra week to spare and had not come prepared to carry out my content analysis in Barbados.

In another case I wrote requesting back issues of a newspaper for particular dates and explained that if those dates were not available, the same day a week or two weeks later should be substituted in a systematic manner. The samples received bore almost no resemblance to the sample requested and the paper had to be dropped from my study. As no explanation was offered, I do not know whether my request was misunderstood or whether the copies were simply not available, in which case the example illustrates the lack of library resources mentioned above.

One final anecdote relates to the fact that the University of the West Indies employs maids to clean our offices. My research assistant was horrified when, on arriving in the office one morning for coding, she found that a sample of newspapers placed in a box on the floor -- rather than on a shelf with other papers -- had been thrown out by the maid who explained that she thought 'old newspapers' should be thrown away!

6) Public Holidays

The United States has eight public holidays. All Caribbean territories have more, several of them having 12 or 13 holidays. Trinidad, in fact, has 13 official holidays plus two unofficial days for Carnival. St. Kitts even has a holiday for the birthday of Prince Charles on November 14th. This can affect the evaluator in two main ways: it can wreak havoc on tight travel schedules. If you are island-hopping and trying to gather data by allowing only a day or two for each island, one unexpected holiday can throw out your entire itinerary. And given the limited plane connections, you may never recover. The moral is to obtain a list of the holidays for each country.

Many Caribbean daily 'diaries' carry a listing for the entire region and you can ask someone to provide you with a photocopy.

Holidays can affect sampling which uses particular sample dates, for example, in content analysis a publication may not appear on certain dates or, if it does, the content may be heavily biased by the particular holiday such as Hindu or Muslim festivals in the eastern Caribbean.

7) Crises

The most common crises in the Caribbean are political. This can affect the evaluation of seemingly non-political programs. For several months before an election many people may not want to answer questions. And projects and programs may be delayed for months or years because of political uncertainty. As mentioned above, political changes also lead to changes of key decision-makers on whom the evaluator may be relying.

Governmental political sensitivity about outsiders asking questions may affect the evaluator in terms of obtaining permission to stay and carry out an evaluation in a country. Such arrangements should be made ahead of time by the organization for which you are working if they think the situation demands it. Otherwise, it is usually safest to enter the territory simply as a tourist or university researcher. Do not say that you are coming to work unless someone has obtained a work permit for you.

Other crises which can affect the success of your evaluation are strikes (of airline employees, electricity companies, for example), and natural disasters such as hurricanes or even heavy rain which can make roads impassible and airline schedules erratic.

8) Suspicion of and Respect for, Outsiders

Two opposing attitudes are at work in relation to outside evaluators and funding sources. One is an attitude of suspicion about the outsider as someone who is coming to pry, may be culturally insensitive, lacking in background information, or wanting to exploit a third world situation.

On the other hand, there is an attitude which values the opinion of the outside expert more than that of the local expert. It is the responsibility of outside evaluators to brief themselves well, to be open to differing cultural patterns and values, not to be judgmental, and above all, not to exploit as so many outsiders have done since the days of colonialism.

Certain information that is usually readily given in the U.S. may be considered private information in the Caribbean and may arouse suspicion, for example, information about political affiliation or family income. Questionnaires and interview schedules should always be vetted by someone within the society in which they are to be administered. This should help eliminate culturally insensitive questions as well as questions which might be misunderstood in a different cultural context.

Caribbean people, like many third world people, are sensitive about exposing weak points to outsiders. There is a sense of pride which dictates that you should always present a good front to the world. Hence, rather than relying entirely on participants' comments, the evaluator should make first hand observations as often as possible.

9) Language

An important part of becoming culturally sensitive is understanding the local language variety as far as possible. In the English-speaking Caribbean this includes Standard English, dialect, Creole and a French-based patois. All Caribbean territories have some differences in spoken language usage and these are impossible to master thoroughly in a short time. Thus foreigners are limited to communicating with Standard English speakers unless an educated local assistant is used. If interviews are being conducted with dialect speakers, the outside evaluator will need to work with a local person who can 'translate' for him. However, in the effort to try to overcome the culture/language gap, some of the meaning may be lost.

As well as needing explanations of Creole and patois, the outside evaluator will often not realize that he/she needs explanations of certain Standard English words and phrases that are used differently in the Caribbean. Caribbean Standard English is different from American Standard English in some respects. Caribbean usage is closer to that of Britain but also has unique aspects. A case in point is the use of the word 'couple' which rarely means 'two' but usually much more than two.

10) Culture, Class, Ideology and Differing Agendas

One basic Caribbean cultural pattern which is typical of much of the third world is a strong sense of the importance of community and interpersonal relationships. In general, the interpersonal interaction that someone is engaged in at a particular moment supersedes all else. If an evaluator is obtaining a sample of opinion from the "person-in-the-street",

and the person is in the company of others, it is difficult to isolate that individual from the group and obtain an opinion that is uncontaminated because the friends will all want to contribute. In homes as well, it is often difficult to obtain individual opinions because the living style is often communal and crowded.

Perhaps the cultural pattern to which North Americans need most sensitization is the sense of time. Although urban and rural areas, as well as individuals, vary somewhat in their observance of time, time is regarded in some respects, not as clock time, but as time for human interactions. Therefore the evaluator should not be offended if someone is very late for a firm(?) appointment and offers the explanation that he just saw an old friend who asked for a ride to the other side of town. The moral here is always to take some work with you to do while waiting, and do not plan your schedule so tightly that it cannot accommodate such eventualities. You should also be aware that rainfall is widely considered a legitimate reason for being late for, or failing to attend, a meeting.

Class and ideology may both play a more important, and/or different role in third world settings than they do in the developed world. All of us have many basic assumptions which are almost never questioned or verbalized. In many third world countries class position, for example, is a significant variable in the minds of some people.

Ideological orientations are difficult to pigeon-hole because the evaluator and his third world contacts have different experiences and education. For example, a position that is considered 'left of center' in the United States may be a middle of the road or slightly right of center position in a third world setting. Such concepts are not directly transferable.

An evaluator may leave a country with a distorted picture if he is unaware that his primary contact may have identified a very limited circle of contacts, particularly in terms of ideology and class, thus limiting the variety of perspectives to which the evaluator is exposed.

Evaluators everywhere in the world face the problem of the varying objectives of different stakeholders in a project. For the outside evaluator this problem may be exacerbated by cultural differences. There may be important cultural/class/ideological reasons for what people do and say, and the evaluator may not be aware of these reasons.

The evaluator should never assume that the people being evaluated are simply irrational. It is extremely valuable for an outside evaluator to work with a local evaluator who can help to explain puzzling reactions. But be aware that important information my be lost or distorted in the process of explaining one culture in terms that someone from a different cultural background can understand.

The best solution, of course, is to live in the culture in which you want to conduct research or evaluation. In many cases evaluators from outside the culture should be avoided unless they have become culturally sensitive and,in all cases, outside evaluators should be accompanied by an evaluator who knows the culture.

***

Being aware of and struggling with the problems identified above should help to bring the evaluator nearer to achieving the understanding essential for a productive evaluation.

NOTES

1. Myrdal, G., Objektivitetsproblemet i Samhällsforskningen, Stockholm, Rabén and Sjögren, 1968, p. 74, quoted in Rolland G. Paulston, "Evaluation and Explication of Educational Reform" in Studies in Educational Evaluation, Vol. 6, Great Britain, Pergammon Press, 1980.

2. Paulston, ibid., p. 301.

3. Ibid., pp. 301-3.

4. Michael Quinn Patton, Utilization-Focused Evaluation, Beverly Hills, Sage, 1978, pp. 237, 203. The perspectives and sensitivities evident in the work of Michael Patton are particularly relevant for evaluators in the third world. See his various books and articles especially Creative Evaluation, Beverly Hills, Sage, 1981. The following articles are also helpful: John Mayo, "Evaluation Strategies for Communication Planning," in Approach to Communication Planning, ed. by John Middleton, Paris, Unesco, 1980; Charles S. Reichardt and Thomas D. Cook, "Beyond Qualitative Versus Quantitative Methods," in Thomas D. Cook and Charles S. Reichardt, eds. Qualitative and Quantitative Methods in Evaluation Research, Beverly Hills, Sage, 1979; and Carol H. Weiss, "Evaluation Research in the Political Context," in Elmer L. Struening and Marcia Guttentag, Handbook of Evaluation Research, Vol. 1, Beverly Hills, Sage, 1975.

5. Utilization-Focused Evaluation, p. 218.

6. For futher reflection on methodological issues see Marlene Cuthbert, "An Application of the Utilization-Focused Approach to Evaluation," Paper presented to seminar on Communication Policy and Planning, Institute of Social Studies, The Hague, Netherlands, July, 1982.